

2 CORINTHIANS 3:7–18

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Smith

⁷ Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? ⁹ If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! ¹⁰ For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. ¹¹ And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

¹² Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

To sin is to rebel against God, to act, or speak, or even to think contrary to his commandments. Our concern with sin lasts our whole lives, because we are subject to temptation, to sinful inclinations, and to bullying of the sinful nature from the moment we are conceived until the moment we breathe our last in this world. The sin Paul exposes here is the sin of disregarding the gospel: the Third Commandment sin of despising God's word.

What may confuse some is the form of the sin, because it is often a case of preferring one part of the Word of God over another. But the sin is when someone loves and adheres entirely to the Law, and rejects the Gospel.

The danger is that in the "Old Covenant," which is the Law, there is no salvation. There is no path to heaven. There is no hand reaching down to save. But the Law is glorious because it shows us the will of God, what he wants of us and requires of us. For sinners like me and you, the Law is a wagging finger that says "shame," and a pointing finger that says "guilty."

The new covenant, the agreement between God and mankind, is not one we ever agreed to or contributed anything to. It is the one-sided covenant of the Gospel. The unbelieving world can't understand the Gospel. Secular literature can hardly find a place for the Gospel. For being transformed into Christ's image is to be drawn away from the image of the sinful

world. And the world does not understand him. We have the understanding of the saved, the rescued, the grateful. What does the world have? “The cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of what it does. But the world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God lives forever.” (1 John 2:15-16). Doing his will is responding to the Gospel.

The New Covenant, the Gospel of the forgiveness of our sins, is more glorious than the old in many ways. **First**, the Old Covenant brought only death. The Gospel brings life, rescue. It is the gift of God that brings eternal life (Romans 6:23).

Second, the Old Covenant, the Law, is the ministry that condemns. But the New is the ministry that brings righteousness. God wants us to be righteous, which means to be free of any sin, to be nothing else but holy and perfect in God’s sight. We can’t manage that, come close to it, and certainly never achieve it ourselves. But God hands it to us and covers us with righteousness through faith in Christ.

So the New Covenant brings life. The New Covenant brings righteousness. And **Third**, the New Covenant never fades. The Lord often spoke with Moses in a tent that was separated from the rest of the people. After these talks, Moses’ face would be shining with a bright light, reflecting the glory of the Lord. But Moses would put a cloth, a veil over his face, at those times, because the light would be fading. Moses didn’t want them to see that the light was fading.

Now, the Law is still glorious. It is still the word of God. And it shows us God’s will and our sinfulness. Without it, we would never understand the need for the Gospel. The Law is a blessing because it hurts us, it shocks us, it displays what’s wrong like a cruel mirror.

The message of the Law, the true Law of the Bible, is this: Look at your life. Without Christ’s love, you can only be condemned.

What a tragedy that so many plug their ears and gnash their teeth at those words! Paul says that they’re the ones who still wear the veil. In Paul’s time, he could easily just pick out the Jews of his day, all of those who had not become Christians the way he and the Apostles had and the rest of Jesus’ mostly Jewish followers. Today there are all kinds of people who reject Christ or try to get around Christ, who look for some highway that doesn’t lead to the cross.

There is sometimes a temptation for people who, after hearing a sermon or two, become sick and tired of it and feel that they know all that, and that they don’t need any more instruction. They may feel the same way about the liturgy, the path of worship that takes us from

confession of faith to confession of sins, to the reminder and declaration of forgiveness, and the reading of the word of God and our responses in music and prayer. This is a sin, which Luther calls simply “to despise preaching and his, God’s, word,” and which ancient Christians called **acidia** (a see dee uh), indolence, sloth, or even boredom with the Word of God. This is a plague where the devil infects the heart. It’s a ploy he uses to take people by surprise and take the word of God away from us.¹ It is slavery to the sinful nature.

But the Gospel brings freedom from that slavery. The gospel brings freedom from the power of sin and the devil and our fallen sinful natures. And it brings freedom from the impossible path of the Law. **“If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under Law (Galatians 5:18).** And, **“The body of sin was done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died had been freed from sin” (Romans 6:6-7).** And this means freedom from death, because we follow Christ, the firstfruits, who has already risen.

Imagine a race where you and other members of your team are running at the same time. The race will be won when any one of you crosses the finish line. You and your team are stretching and getting ready, and you stoop down to tie your shoelaces. Bang! goes the starting gun, and in a flash, before you’ve even begun to run, your teammate Jesus has crossed the finish line. This is the doctrine of the resurrection. You have already won because Christ won. He was first, and no matter what, you have won, too, because you’re on his team, you’re wearing the same jersey. You and I are two thousand years late, but we’ve still won the victory and have the wreath of the resurrection because Christ won in our place.

This is a glory that never fades. This is a glory that shines from Christ on us all, forever. As you run the rest of the race, remember that we’ve already won. Whatever hurdles, whatever turns and curves, whatever stumbling blocks are there in the way, take them with joy in your heart and a smile on your face. Reflect the glory of Jesus Christ, who has forgiven your sins, who has overcome the impossible law by keeping it perfectly himself, who has already won. Run with the ever-increasing glory of renewed faith, a re-energized desire to serve, and humble thanks to our Savior who has done all of these things for us.

And the peace of God that transcends our understanding guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luther: Large Catechism, *Third Commandment* (1:99).